Sears, Roebuck Department Store (Comstock Library)
W. 906 Main Avenue
Spokane
Spokane County
Washington

HABS No. WA-194

HAES
WASH
32-SPOK,
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Western Region
Department of Interior
San Francisco, California 94102

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
SEARS, ROEBUCK DEPARTMENT STORE (Comstock Library) HABS NO. WA-194

Location: West 906 Main Avenue (bounded by Main Avenue, Lincoln Street and Spokane Falls Boulevard)
Spokane
Spokane County
Washington

USGS Spokane NW, WASH Quadrangle (7.5'),
Universal Trasverse Mercator
Coordinates: 11.468140.5278330

Present Owner: City of Spokane

Present Use: City of Spokane Main Library and administrative offices

The building is slated to be demolished in January 1992.

Significance: The property is architecturally significant as a well-preserved large-scale department store building. The Art Deco building represents the top-of-the-line store in the Sears, Roebuck and Company national retail chain. It is a legacy of the retail development of downtown Spokane and its position as a regional retail center. In addition to being one of the few remaining Art Deco buildings in Spokane, it is also the best preserved example of an Art Deco Sears store in the state of Washington. And, as such, is an important example of a nationally promulgated design.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. **Date of erection:** According to articles dated 6 October 1929 and 17 August 1929 in The Spokesman-Review construction of the Sears, Roebuck Department Store began in September of 1929. An article in The Spokesman-Review dated 27 February 1930 recorded the opening day of the Sears, Roebuck Department Store.

2. **Architect:** Nimmons, Carr & Wright, Chicago, IL. Nimmons, Carr & Wright designed numerous buildings for Sears and Roebuck during its transition from a catalogue store to a major in-store retailer. George C. Nimmons was born in Wooster, Ohio in 1865 and died in Chicago on 17 June 1947. He was educated at the local Academy in Wooster and studied in architecture in Europe. At the age of eighteen he entered the Chicago office of Burnham & Root, and for a decade served as a draftsman. From 1897 to 1910 Nimmons maintained a partnership with William K. Fellows. During that period, they planned a number of large commercial buildings in Chicago with the huge Sears & Roebuck Plant as one of their most successful works. Following its completion, the firm was commissioned to design branch buildings for Sears in several mid-western cities. Nimmons practiced alone until 1917 then formed the George C. Nimmons & Company. In 1921 Nimmons was awarded a gold medal for industrial design at the National Architectural Exhibition in Washington D.C. (for the Eastern Store of Sears & Roebuck at Philadelphia.) Although Withey indicates that the firm Nimmons, Carr & Wright was not formed until 1933 (to 1945), several journal articles and the 1929 plans for the Spokane Sears building indicate the firm name Nimmons, Carr & Wright prior to 1933.

3. **Original and subsequent owners:** Sears Roebuck and Company purchased the site from the Spokane, Coeur d 'Alene & Palouse Railway Company in 1929 (Great Northern railway in newspaper accounts.) Building construction by Sears, Roebuck and Company began in that year. In 1961, the Comstock Foundation purchased the land and building from Sears, Roebuck and Company with the stipulation that it would be used as a public library. In September 1961, the Comstock Foundation presented the Sears building to the City of Spokane for conversion to a new main public library.

The parcel upon which the building is sited is legally described as follows: Parcel "A": that area bounded by Main Avenue, Spokane Falls Boulevard and Lincoln Street and more specifically described as follows: That part of

the NW 1/4 of the SE 1/4 of the SW 1/4 of Section 18, Township 25 North, Range 43, EWM, described as follows:

Beginning at the NW corner of Main Avenue and Lincoln Street; thence N 89° 58' W along the north right-of-way of Main Avenue, 153.48 feet; thence N 59° 42' 40" W along a straight line, 34.73 feet; thence N 56° 12' 45" W along a straight line, 79.95 feet to the beginning of a non-tangent curve to the right; thence NEly along said curve, through a central angle of 11° 9' 30" and a radius of 516 feet (Long Chord bears N 38° 3' 15" E) 100.33 feet to a point of compound curvature; thence NEly along a curve to the right, through a central angle of 13° 28' 40" and a radius of 800.72 feet (Long Chord bears N 50° 22' 20" E), 187.92 feet to a point of compound curvature; thence NEly along a curve to the right, through a central angle of 53° 54' 30" and a radius of 49 feet (Long Chord bears N 84° 3' 30" E), 44.42 feet to a point on the west right-of-way line of Lincoln Street; thence S 0° 10' 30" W along the west right-of-way line of Lincoln Street 265.5 feet to the point of beginning.

Parcel "B": that area bounded by Spokane Falls Boulevard, Monroe Street, and the Spokane River and more specifically described as follows: That part of the NW 1/4 of the SE 1/4 of the SW 1/4 of Section 18, Township 25 North, Range 43, EWM, described as follows:

Beginning at the NE corner of Main Avenue and Monroe Street; thence N 0° 2' E along the east right-of-way of Monroe Street, 114.85 feet which is the true point of beginning; thence continuing along said right-of-way line 67.15 feet to a point; thence N 90° east along a straight line, 108.65 feet to the beginning of a non-tangent curve to the left; thence SWly along said curve, through a central angle of 0° 40' 10" and a radius of 849.72 feet, (Long Chord bears S 43° 48' W), 9.92 feet to a point of compound curvature; thence SWly along a curve to the left, through a central angle of 7° 53' 50" and a radius of 565 feet (Long Chord bears S 39° 41' W), 77.81 feet; thence N 89° 58' W along a straight line, 51.88 feet to the point of beginning.

1929 Contract, Doc. A9863, recorded 11 October 1929, in Contracts Book U, p. 541. Spokane, Coeur d 'Alene & Palouse Railway Co. to Sears Roebuck & Co.

1961 Warranty Deed, Doc. 810896B,31 August 1961, recorded in Volume 788, p. 248, August 1961. Sears, Roebuck and Company to the Comstock

Foundation (R.E. Lowe, Horton Herman and E.H. Braden, trustees.)

1961 Quit Claim Deed, Doc. 810897B, 27 September 1961, Volume 788, p. 251. Comstock Foundation to the City of Spokane.

4. **Builder/Contractor:** Wallace DeWitt, supervising engineer in charge of construction, and Louis DeWitt, general superintendent of construction both represented Sears, Roebuck and Company. According to an article in the The Spokesman-Review dated 27 February 1930, L.H. Hoffman of Portland Oregon was the general contractor.

Twenty-eight subcontracts were awarded to local Spokane firms: Beardmore Transfer Company, Charles, A Power, A.E. Dibble, Eggers Pole and Supply Co., C.M. Fassett Co., Consolidated Supply Co., Union Sand and Gravel Co., Long Lake Lumber Co., Pacific Coast Steel Co., American Fire Brick Co., Hedlund Lumber and Manufacturing Co., Union Iron Works, Jones & Dillingham, Carlson & Wihlen Co., Potlatch Lumber Co., E.E. Murray, Brandt Bros., Standard Fence Co., James Smyth Plumbing & Heating Co., Brown Johnston Co., Otis Elevator Co., Jensen-Byrd Co., Holly-Mason Hardware Co., Washington Brick & Lime Co., Electrical Products Corporation. It was reported that 80 percent of the building and fixtures cost was spent in Spokane.

5. **Original plans and construction:** Original plans are dated 9 September 1929 and were revised 21 October 1929 by Nimmons Carr & Wright Architects of Chicago. Available plans include basement,first, second, third and roof floor plans; elevations of each facade; and various detail drawings (Photo Nos. 15-22.) Mechanical drawings of the same dates are signed by Martin C. Schwab, Consulting Engineer (Chicago, IL.) These drawings include heating, ventilating, sprinkler and plumbing for the basement, first, second, third floors, and mechanical rooms.

The Spokesman-Review, 27 February 1930, devoted its a major portion of its Second Section to the grand opening of the new store. It reported that the Sears invested $750,000 in building, site and stock for its new store. An article reporting the opening described the store as follows:

> ...housed in a typical Sears-Roebuck building of three stories and basement surmounted by a 30-foot tower 25 feet square and a penthouse. The building is roughly 125X130 feet, but with some offsets that take away the square appearance. It has a

reenforced concrete shell, floor slabs 10 inches thick and a cream-colored Amercian brick exterior in basket weave design with cast stone ornamentation in modernistic straight lines. Window sash and iron work are green.

Features of the building include high velocity steam system for ventilating and heating, separate ventilating system for kitchen and lavatories, modern sprinkler system for fire protection, large freight elevator, Philippine mahogany woodwork in the sales areas, beautifully finished show windows all along the east and south sides and high illumination.

6. **Alterations and additions**: It appears that the first alterations to the building took place as the building was being constructed. The original Elevation Drawings (Photo Nos. 20 & 21) indicate the second floor windows were to be forty-two inches tall four-over-four double-hung metal-sash windows. The windows actually installed were seven feet tall. Correspondingly, the belt course dividing the first and second stories is approximately thirty-six inches lower than indicated on the drawings.

In 1961 Sears sold its former department store to the Comstock Foundation for $350,000 (the building was valued at $600,000, and Sears donated the difference.) The Comstock Foundation then donated the building to the city for conversion into a new library. (A 2 October 1961 appraisal by the County Assessor placed the building value at $466,667.) On 13 March 1962, Spokane voters approved a $300,000 bond issue to remodel the building. Plans for alterations to the Comstock Building for the Spokane Public Library were completed by Spokane architect Carl W. Vantyne in August 1962. The Gus J. Bouton Construction Company began work in September 1962 and completed the remodeling in March 1963. The remodeling contract totaled $263,008.72. On 6 April 1963, the new Spokane Public Library opened its doors.

Exterior alterations that occurred during the refitting were relatively minor. They included the blocking and bricking in of the east entrance and display window adjacent to the south (Lincoln Street.) The incised letters "Sears Roebuck and Company" were covered with stucco and replaced with "Spokane Public Library Comstock Building" in 1-foot-1-inch high aluminum ribbon letters. The front entryway (Main Avenue) was reconfigured with replacement of the original doors and transom windows with aluminum-framed glass doors (to be replaced by automatic doors in 1977.) One of the door

openings between the unloading room and platform was bricked in and replaced by two windows.

Interior alterations, primarily completed during the library conversion, consisted of removing display walls and cases, and the lighting system. Walls were added, to essentially an open floor plan, to meet the space requirements of the library, new flooring was installed except for the stairs and basement, and a suspended acoustical tile ceiling with lighting and heating vents was added.

The Library's "Buildings and Improvements Ledger" (no date), lists improvements (and costs) to the building from its initial remodel to 1986. Some 35 different projects have been completed during this period: most have been minor such as painting and maintenance. Projects that have resulted in more substantive changes to the building include remodeling (and addition of new rooms) of the third floor in 1974, 1980, and 1983; addition of Northwest room on first floor in 1983; installation of the automatic front doors in 1977; and addition of new boiler and heating system in 1986.

B. Historical Context

Richard W. Sears began the company which bears his name in 1886. As a young railroad agent in Redwood, Minnesota, Sears came across a shipment of watches a jeweler refused to accept. Knowing the demand for watches among railroad workers, Sears contacted the watch company and obtained the watches at a considerable discount. He then proceeded to write his fellow workers describing the watches and offering them at an exceptional price. Sears soon sold out of his stock and made a good profit. He then quit as a railroad agent and started selling watches by catalog.

By 1887 Sears' growing business required that he hire a watch repairman. He hired Alvah Curtis Roebuck who later became a partner in the firm. By the turn of the century, Sears, Roebuck and company had expanded its catalog selection to include everything from watches and clothing, to furniture and farm equipment. Sears catered in particular to the needs of rural populations.

In 1924 Robert Wood, an ex-army general, was hired by Sears to develop the company's retail chain stores. Wood had previously worked for Sears competitor, Montgomery Ward for whom he had experimented with retail stores. Sears opened its first retail store in February 1925. Seven more stores opened that year: four were in mail-order plants (Chicago, Seattle, Dallas, and Kansas City), and three were built as retail stores (one in

Philadelphia and two in Chicago.) In October, a retail store was opened in Evansville , Indiana, the first in a city without a catalogue plant.

Sears classified its retail outlets into three types of stores. The "A" store, the major department store, contained almost all of the items featured in the catalog. The next class was the "B" store which was smaller and usually consisted of space leased in an existing building. The reduced store size somewhat limited the amount of merchandise in stock and catalogue orders remained an important component.
The "C" store, in turn, featured only hardware and household items, neglecting clothes and furniture. The "C" stores were usually located in the suburbs or in small towns.

During the late 1920s and early 30s, Sears was in fierce competition with Montgomery Ward and J.C. Penney for strategic locations for their stores. Also competition from J.C. Penney was cutting into the catalogue business of both Sears and Wards (Penney had opened 548 stores between 1920 and 1926.)

By 1928 Sears had opened 37 Class A stores, 150 Class B and 5 Class C stores. In 1927 Montgomery Ward had set a goal to open 1500 retail stores by the end of 1929, (and compromised on 500 as more realistic) and at the beginning of 1928 had opened only 37. At the end of 1928 Sears had 192 stores with a gross sales volume of $107,179,000 for 30.9 percent of its total sales. Montgomery Ward had expanded to 244 retail stores but with a sales volume of $48,000,000 for 22.4 percent of its total.

By the end of 1929, when construction of the Spokane store commenced, Sears had a total of 48 class A, 237 Class B, and 34 Class C stores. The retail stores percentage of total sales volume had risen to 46.3 percent.

Even though the store in Spokane was constructed in the central business district, it was Sears philosophy to locate Class A stores in outlying shopping districts rather than in central cities. Also most of Sears retail stores occupied leased space. As late as 1932, 345 of its 385 stores were leased.

Situated in the midst of a vast rural/agricultural area, Spokane served as a major retail, financial, and service center. This proved an ideal location for a major Sears retail facility. Sears scouts had apparently had their eye on Spokane for more than a year before finally settling on the old Inland Electric Terminal Building

(constructed in 1906.) According to a 30 July 1929 front page article of The Spokesman-Review, Sears had just purchased the property from the Great Northern railway and would take possession on 1 September. Montgomery Ward, which had its new retail store under construction a block to the northeast, had apparently held an option on the site prior to purchase by Sears. Sears moved rapidly. It was reported that Sear's engineer Wallace DeWitt (who grew up in Spokane) was in the city to gather building information so as to plan construction of the new store. By September plans were drawn. A Review article of 4 October, reported that the Sears, Roebuck plans were on file at city hall and that the building permit was being awaited.

Construction began in October. An article in the Review's October 27th edition included a photo of the excavation site and noted the unusual scene it portrayed. The caption indicated that a pile driver was inserting cedar piles into the fill which comprised the site and then boxing them with cement to provide piers for the new building. The main thrust of the article, however, was to provide a history of the site itself. Back in the early days, the site had been a ravine through which a small creek trickled. After the city's disastrous fire of 1889, the ravine became a depository of conflagration debris: "broken bricks, parts of old stoves, ruined safes, broken dishes, battered and twisted bed frames - everything that went into the construction and furnishing of early-day homes that flames could not consume."

The building rose rapidly and the new Sears and Roebuck store was opened on 27 February 1930. The entire front page of the Second Section of The Spokesman-Review edition of that day was devoted to the store's opening. Mayor Leonard Funk turned the key to open the doors and allow the thousands of spectators to inspect the $500,000 store. The Spokane Sears store was the 72nd class "A" store constructed in the United States.

The store was opened in a period of fierce competition among department stores, shop owners, and other merchants for retail dollars in Spokane. From the 1900s to the 1960s most Spokane merchants had their businesses downtown, and shoppers sought goods within the shops of the city center. Indeed, Montgomery Ward had completed its seven-story edifice (reinforced concrete, Art Deco) a year before Sears opened its store. S.H. Kress also entered the Spokane retail picture in 1929. Kress built a four story store (terra cotta, Art Deco) one and one-half blocks east of the Sears store.

Local businesses like Davenport's and Haddad's specialized in merchandise and apparel aimed at an upper end market. The locally owned Crescent and Palace department stores concentrated on upscale clothing and home furnishings. In contrast, the Sears and Montgomery Ward chain stores offered a wide range of affordable merchandise which appealed to a broad clientele and satisfied many needs.

Of the locally-owned department store operations, the original Crescent store building has been demolished, and the Palace now houses Nordstrom. The latter building was constructed in 1909, but the exterior has been significantly altered. The second Crescent store, an impressive Neoclassical building elegantly clad with terra cotta (Wall and Main), was erected in 1919 and is now operated by Frederick and Nelson. The Kress building has been altered and retains none of its original integrity. The Montgomery Ward building was remodeled in the 1980s to house the Spokane City Hall.

Sears finally began to realize its retail philosophy of locating its stores in the suburbs in the late 1950s. An article in The Spokesman-Review on 19 June 1959 announced that Sears Roebuck had purchased 12.3 acres of land and would build a new ultra modern store in the northtown district of the city. Sears would be an anchor for the new Northtown Shopping Center.

In June 1961 Sears opened its Northtown store and in August sold the downtown building to the Comstock Foundation. The foundation, a charitable trust, was established by the late Mrs. Joisie C. Shadle in honor of her father, J. M. Comstock. He was Spokane's mayor for a two-year term circa 1900 (The Spokesman Review, 12 December 1969.) On 27 September 1961 the Comstock Foundation granted the building to the city of Spokane for its new main library with the stipulation that Comstock be used as the building name. A $300,000 bond issue was approved by Spokane voters on 13 March 1962 to make the library conversion.

Spokane architect Carl W. Vantyne was commissioned to oversee the remodeling of the Sears Building. Gus J. Bouten Construction of Spokane completed the remodeling work and by early March had the building ready to be occupied. The library opening was described by the Spokane Daily Chronicle in its 4 April 1963 edition. "At the stroke of 9 City Librarian R. Bruce Carrick put the key into the lock and seven seconds later the glistening doors swung open to admit the first patrons." Mayor Neal Fosseen presided at the 22 April dedication of city's the new main library.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. **Architectural character:** The Sears, Roebuck Department Store is a square three story Art Deco style building with a five story tower projecting above the building mass. The building, completed in 1930, boasts a structural system of reinforced concrete. The foundation is supported by 940 cedar pilings driven to depths of 15 to 30 feet. It is the best preserved example of an Art Deco Sears store in Washington State, and an impressive example of Art Deco style in Spokane. The structure is also important on a national scale. Art Deco was the "house style" of Sears, Roebuck and Company, creating a mechanism which helped disseminate both the style and Sears' corporate name throughout the country.

The architectural firm of Nimmons, Carr & Wright, as primary architects for Sears, conveyed this style which used the Art Deco and a central tower as the Sears signature. Several articles of the period which included photographs of the Nimmons, Carr & Wright buildings indicate that this style was used nation-wide. Indeed a photograph of a Buffalo, New York Sears store in June 1931 Architectural Record depicts a building nearly identical to the Spokane store.

2. **Condition of fabric:** The building is generally in good condition. With the exception of exterior paint which is peeling, the building has been well-maintained and those details associated with the Art Deco style are in good condition. Evidence of unequal setting is manifested by cracks and sloping floor in the basement.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. **Overall dimensions:** The three story building has a width of 124 feet 11 inches and depth of 129 feet 11 inches (Photo No. 16.) Projecting 26 feet 6 inches from the north side (rear) of the building is a wing which is 74 feet 8 inches wide. It includes the one-story unloading room and the three-story automobile entrance and stairwell to which are correspondingly attached a loading platform and an entry vestibule. The loading platform is 49 feet 2-inches long and 10 feet 6 inches wide. The entry vestibule projects 7 feet 2 inches north of the entry and is 22 feet 8 inches wide.

The second and third floors, which do not include the unloading room, have the same dimensions as the first floor (Photo Nos. 17 & 18.) Since it projects beneath

the sidewalks along the Main Avenue and Lincoln Street frontages, the basement is slightly larger in size (136 feet 5 inches wide and 151 feet 2 inches deep) (Photo No. 15.)

The first floor is divided into five equal bays: the centered tower which contains the entry (two double doors), and two window bays (display windows) on each side (Photo Nos. 5 & 6.) The second and third stories consist of a single window bay in the central tower with six window bays flanking each side. The fourth and fifth floors of the tower each contain a single, centered window bay.

The three-story mass is 46 feet 6 inches from grade to the top of the parapet. The equipment room on the northwest corner (50 feet 7 inches wide and 30 feet deep along the west side and 27 feet 7 inches deep along the east side) rises 14 feet 8 inches above the parapet. Imbedded in the center of the front facade is a five-story tower, 24 feet 6 inches square and 77 feet 4 inches in height (from grade to parapet.)

2. **Foundations:** The building has structural system of reinforced concrete exterior walls and interior columns. It is underlain by 940 cedar pilings driven to depths of 15 to 30 feet, then boxed in concrete to form piers which support 10-inch-thick reinforced concrete floor slabs. Footings along the exterior walls extend 12 inches to 24 inches beneath the walls. The basement walls along the Main Avenue and Lincoln Street frontages are 2 feet 2 inches thick, and the walls along the west and north sides are 1 foot 1 inch thick. Columns, centered at intervals of 25 feet, buttress the north and west walls. These columns project 4 inches from the exterior wall and are 5 feet wide. The interior sections of the columns project 12 inches and are 2 feet 6 inches wide (Photo No. 15.)

3. **Walls:** The above-grade walls are reinforced concrete which range in thickness from 13 inches to 18 inches. The exterior of the building is clad with blonde brick (painted beige color) with pre-cast concrete Art Deco detailing on the parapet, windows and door surrounds, and other accent points (Photo Nos. 10, 11 & 12.) Multiple string courses enhance the parapet and consist of a cast concrete lintel course above the third floor windows, two decorative brick soldier courses (alternating recessed and projecting)and a coping course. Both the lintel and coping courses are in an intricate Art Deco pattern consisting of a series of flared diamonds. Articulated pilasters, capped in forms consisting of triangle, chevron and diamond patterns, frame the door and display window openings.

The narrow architrave above the display windows is adorned in a diamond relief pattern as are the pilasters. Pre-cast diamond-shaped panels with geometric-form relief are located on the facade between the window bays above the pilasters.

The brick field between the tops of the window bays and the second story sills is in American bond. The piers between the window bays are also in American bond. A vertically-aligned brick stretcher course (alternating projected and recessed bricks) frames the window bays.

The central tower projects from the front facade approximately 12 inches. Its vertical lines are accentuated by articulated corners and the pre-cast pilasters which frame the main entry (same motif on blocked east entrance) and rise to middle of the second floor windows. Brick in American bond faces the tower. The spandrels between the second through fifth story windows is brick in pattern formed by angled headers. The tower is capped with geometric Art Deco detailing in a fan motif (Photo Nos. 12 & 22.)

The side facades, each divided into fifteen bays, use the same detail elements as the front. Several brick panels on the side and rear elevations, however, are laid in a basket weave pattern (Photo Nos. 7, 9 & 21.)

4. **Structural system, framing:** The structural system consists of reinforced concrete exterior walls and interior concrete columns. In the basement, nine free-standing square columns (2 feet 6 inches) are beneath and support the east and south walls. Square piers spaced 20 feet on center, are imbedded in the west and north walls. They extend through the three stories to the roof and decrease in dimension to 2-foot square at the third floor. Round columns (2 feet 6 inches in diameter) with inverted cone capitals spaced in a square grid 25 feet on center support the first floor (Photo No. 21.) The capitals are approximately 1 foot 8 inches in height and taper to 5 feet in diameter at the top. They, in turn, support 8-foot-square, 6-inch-thick panels which support the floor. This column system extends through the second and third floors to support the roof system. As the columns rise to the third story, their diameters decrease to 2 feet. The interior column system and exterior wall system was designed to create an open space without the need for load-bearing walls.

The floors, which are tied into the wall system, are 10-inch-thick reinforced concrete. The original floors of the basement and third stories, and forth and fifth floors in the tower were coated with 1-inch-thick cement

(basement floor marked in a 12-inch grid pattern) and the first and second floors were 1 inch thick: a plank subfloor with maple strip finish.

5. **Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads:** At the rear of the building (northwest corner) is a covered concrete unloading platform (Photo No. 11.) The platform is 3 feet high, 48 feet long and 10 feet wide. A solid brick wall, extending 13 feet from the unloading room, forms its west side. The platform is covered by a steel canopy which projects 4 feet 6 inches over the platform edge. Steel hanger rods anchored to the end of the building support the canopy.

6. **Chimneys:** A steel stack with an inside diameter of 3 feet 4 inches rises from the penthouse roof on the northwest corner of the building. The stack extends 9 feet from the roof for a total height of 70 feet (Photo Nos. 8 & 21.)

7. **Openings:**

a. Doorways and doors: The front entry (Main Street) consists of two sets of double aluminum-framed glass doors (side-by-side) which open to an entry vestibule. Both open automatically with one set for entry and one for exit. An identical set of doors opens to the interior. The doors are set in aluminum frames with one aluminum-framed, horizontally-louvered transom window over each set (6'2" X 3'10") (Photo No. 1.) The doors and transom windows replaced the original metal-frame plate glass doors when the building was converted to the library in 1962 (the automatic door system was installed in 1977.) In the original building, the door head was decorated in an Art Deco diamond pattern and the transom windows were wood sash with three vertical lights over each door (Photo No. 22.) The Lincoln Street entrance (east side) which is now blocked was essentially identical to the original front entrance.

The rear contains the automobile entrance and the unloading platform entries. There were originally two door openings between the platform and the unloading room. Both were 7 feet wide and 8 feet high. One of the openings has been filled with brick and replaced by two windows. The remaining opening contains two double-hinged wooden doors. Each door has a 3-foot metal kickplate and 12-inch-square wire window at eye-level. Two 2'10" X 2'4" coal doors are in the end of the platform.

The unaltered automobile entrance (actually for

pedestrians that have arrived in automobiles) is the same size as the original entries on Main Avenue and Lincoln Street) The doors to the automobile entrance are single-light plate glass with painted metal frames (and brass kick plate) (Photo No. 11.) The entry opening is 13 feet 5 inches wide and 12 feet 8 inches high. Two sets of 3' X 7' doors are divided by a grooved pilaster which extends to the top of the opening. One three-light transom window (vertically-ribbed glass) is over each of the doors. A decorative transom bar separates the doors and windows.

These doors open to an entry vestibule which has a concrete floor incised in a pattern of 4-inch squares (painted red.) Inside of each door pair is a 2-foot by 6-foot inset for rubber foot-wipe mats. Two sets of double doors provide access to the interior: one opens to the landing for the basement stairs, and the other opens to the landing for the second floor stairs. The doors to the basement are wood panel, and those to the second floor are glass panel (same size as exterior doors.)

Fire exit doors occupy the third bays from the east corner at the second and third stories. The 3-foot by 7-foot doors are metal with a lower solid panel and an upper four-light glass panel.

Two door openings are located on the roof, one in the penthouse, and one in the tower. Both 6-foot by 7-foot openings contain metal-framed, double metal doors.

b. Windows: The first floor of the front facade contains four display windows framed with bronze sash. The openings are 10 feet 6 inches high and vary from 18 to 20 feet 6 inches in length. Within the openings are 8-foot-tall plate glass windows divided into three sections - a large center section flanked by narrow vertical sections. Above the display windows is a six-light transom window with fixed sash (Photo No. 10.) These windows have been painted and are no longer functional. The transom windows over the entry doors have been described.

The tower contains four window openings - one per floor (Photo No. 5.) All are one-over-one-light, double-hung painted metal sash. The second floor window is shorter than the others and the top section has been replaced by a plywood panel (painted brown) in which a 24-inch circular aluminum vent has been placed. The west and east

side windows of the tower (fourth and fifth floors) are four-over-four light, double-hung metal sash (Photo No. 12.)

The second and third floor windows are of identical size and configuration. All are one-over-one light, double-hung metal sash. It should be noted that the original elevation plans (Photo Nos. 20 & 21) indicate the second floor windows to be 4 feet 6 inches in height. When constructed, however, the window height was increased to 7 feet, the same size as the third floor windows.

The first floor of the east facade contains one 20-foot 6-inch long display window (same as in front) south of the former Lincoln Street entrance and six one-over-one double-hung wood sash windows on the north side (with a sill line 8 feet above grade) (Photo No. 7.) The lower sashes of the four northerly windows have been removed and replaced by galvanized metal panels in which metal vents have been placed. There were originally two display windows on the south side of the entry, but the one adjacent to the entry has been filled with brick (as has the entry.)

Except the windows above the original Lincoln Street entrance, the second and third story windows (fifteen bays) are identical to those of the front facade.

The windows over the entrance are configured identically, but are 4 feet 6 inches in height rather than 7 feet as the others.

The west facade is also divided into fifteen bays (Photo No. 9) with two bays on the attached unloading room. The first floor windows are clustered into a five bay configuration. The middle bay is filled with brick, the flanking bays have three windows each, the northerly bay contains two outside windows with the center filled with brick, and the southerly bay has two windows with the southern-most filled with brick (all original construction per the plans.) The eight windows, as well as those of the unloading room) contain four-over-four double-hung metal sash. The sill line is 8 feet above grade and the glass is obscured with chicken wire.

The second and third stories are divided into fifteen equally-spaced bays. From south to north the 7th, 8th, 9th, and 14th bays are filled with brick (original.) All windows have four-over-four

light, double-hung metal sash. The window height is 7 feet (same as third floor) as opposed to 4 feet 6 inches as shown on the original plans. The third floor windows are configured identically to those of the second floor. (The 9th and 14th bays are filled with brick.) The three windows of the west side of the penthouse are aligned over those of the lower floors and are configured identically to those of the first floor. The glass of the second and third story windows is obscured with chicken wire.

The asymmetrical rear (north) facade is divided into fifteen bays (Photo Nos. 8 & 20.) The transom windows of the centered entry bay are described in Section 7a. The two windows that replaced the loading door in the platform area are 2-light, fixed aluminum frame, 4 feet wide and 6 feet tall. The first floor windows on the portion of the facade east of the entry are four-over-four, double-hung metal sash with obscured chicken wire glass (easterly three) and one-over-one, double-hung wood sash (westerly two, one is filled with brick.) As with the first floor windows on the east and west facades, the sill lines are 8 feet above grade.

The second and third story windows are double-hung metal sash, either four-over-four or one-over-one light. The windows are also either clear glass or obscured wire glass.

8. **Roof:** The building has a flat roof which consists of tar and roll asphalt roofing over a reinforced concrete slab. The roof is set 3 feet below the top of the parapet. The roof plan describes the roof as "pitch and gravel" (Photo No. 19.) The roofs of the tower and penthouse are the same as the main roof.

C. Description of Interior:

1. **Floor plans:** The original floor plans are shown on Photo Nos. 15-18. The plans were essentially the same for the basement, first and second floors in that they featured an open floor for display of retail goods. The third floor was also open and used for storage. Other common features included stairwells along the center west wall and center north wall, restrooms adjacent to the north side of the west stairwell on all floors but the first, and a freight elevator and utility rooms in the northwest corner of the building.

The plans had the following differences. In the basement, which extended on the east and south sides

beneath the exterior sidewalk had a boiler room and coal room in the northwest corner and a mechanical room in the southeast corner. On the first floor, space was dedicated along the south and south half of the east walls for window display with a wall separating the display area from the retail area. The northwest corner of the building included an unloading room and covered unloading platform. The second and third floors did not contain the building area which housed the basement boiler room and the first floor unloading room.

Apparently, Sears had made some interior alterations to the store prior to 1961 when the building was sold to the Comstock Foundation. The demolition plans for the library (10 August 1962) indicate a large L-shaped walled area in the southwest corner of the second floor as well as several offices in the southwest corner of the third floor.

Although the conversion to the library retained large open floor areas, walls and equipment were added to each of the floors. Common to all floors was the addition of a passenger elevator and a book lift near the southeast corner of the west stairwell, and a booklift in the central portion of the building. A small booklift connecting the basement and first floors was also installed in the north central portion of the building.

During the remodel the walls were added in the basement to divide it into three functional areas: the public area which includes the periodical reading room and existing men's restroom; the book and periodical storage area, open to staff only; and the utility and maintenance area. (Sketch plans which show the basement, first, second, and third floor arrangements are attached.)

On the first floor, the public entrance is limited to the Main Avenue entrance. In the original layout counters for book return and check-out flanked the main entrance. The check-out counter is now at the west side of the entrance. A reference desk is at the center of the floor east of the main stairs. Plaster over sheet rock walls were added to the south and north sides of the main stairs. Aluminum-framed glass partitions and doors were placed at the entry to the stairwell. North of the stairs is the Northwest Room, formed by 7-foot-high plaster walls. South of the stairwell is an office formed by 7-foot-high metal and glass partition walls. Another office, formed by plaster walls, is on the south side of the elevator. Other changes include the division of the unloading room into two rooms by a plaster wall - one used for unloading and maintenance (west portion) and the other for administrative

functions. On the south side of the administrative room is a small office formed by 7-foot-high partition walls. The north stairwell has been walled-in and closed to public access. Two doors provide access to a hallway on the east side of the stairs then to the rear entrance and basement stairs. A wall has been added along the east side of the hallway to create a narrow work room.

As with the first floor, the main stairwell has been walled-in with access provided by aluminum-framed glass doors. A plaster wall (with double-door entry) closes off the north stairwell from public access. Seven-foot-high partition walls have been used to form three offices along the central portion of the south wall and east of the stairwell along the north wall. An auditorium (plaster walls) with a projection booth on its south side (prefabricated walls covered with fabric) has been placed in the center of the north half of the building. A plaster wall has been extended between the women's restroom and the auditorium. This area, in the northwest corner, is used for storage and various utility functions. The hallway created between the rear of the auditorium and the wall closing in the north stairwell provides access to a boy's restroom and a girl's restroom along the north wall.

The third floor is closed to the public and used for library administrative offices. Only the northwest corner of the building and the restrooms retain the same space configuration as the original building. The remainder of the area has been divided into administrative offices, storage areas, conference rooms, and various work rooms.

2. **Stairways**: There are four sets of stairways in the building. Two were originally for general public use and linked floors on which retail activities took place: the basement to first, and first to second. These stairs also extend to the third floor which was originally used for storage. They are located near the centers of the west and north sides of the building. The third set of stairs, in the northwest corner of the building, connects the third floor and penthouse (and roof and tower.) The fourth set is in the basement and provides access to the furnace room.

The main stairs (west side) from the first floor rise with fourteen steps to an intermediate landing then switchback with fourteen steps to the second floor; and descend in a similar configuration with eleven and eleven steps to the basement (Photo Nos. 13, 14 & 18.) The stairs are 10 feet wide and divided by a center baluster. They are constructed of cement on steel frames (originally with rubber tile on the treads and

platforms.) The stair treads and landings are covered with 12-inch-square creme-colored linoleum tiles. Brass strips finish the edges. Wrought iron bars (5/8-inch square and spaced 4 inches apart - with every third one twisted) are used for the balusters which are topped with molded oak rails.

The stairs from the second to the third floor are approached from a solid metal door on the south side of the landing. The stairs are concrete-on-steel-frame and only five feet wide. Fourteen steps ascend (to west) to a landing, then 8 steps switchback to the third floor. The steps are covered with six-inch-square linoleum tiles and with a three-inch cross-hatched metal edge. Two-inch steel pipes (painted blue-gray) serve as railings. The railings of the lower run is affixed to the wall, while those on the inside of the upper run are attached to 4-inch-square steel posts (Photo No. 18.)

In the present library configuration, only the west stairway is open to public use, and only between the basement and second floors.

The rear entry stair system is also concrete on steel frame. From the first floor, they descend in a straight run of 19 steps to a landing, then 3 more steps to the basement floor. The stairs to the second floor are approached from a hallway that also provides access to the first floor. In a separate stairwell, they ascend 17 steps (toward the north) to a landing then switchback with 11 steps to the second floor (the stairs were designed to link the two retail floors, rather than provide access to the rear.)

These stairs are the same dimension with the same baluster configuration as the the main stairs. The stairs to the basement are covered with a speckled beige-colored linoleum (12" X 42" strips) with a 6-inch-wide speckled black outside edge. The first floor approach landing is covered with 12-inch-square creme-colored linoleum tiles. The stairs to the second floor use the same material and color. The intermediate landing, however, consists of 12-inch-square tiles that are brown with blue marbling. It is edged with 12-inch square tiles that are black with black speckles. The balusters and rails are painted blue-gray. The second floor approach landing is covered with 12-inch-square creme-colored tiles.

The stairs from the second to the third floor are approached from a vestibule on the west side of the landing. The vestibule floor is covered with 18-inch-square marbled grey linoleum tiles. A single metal two-panel door (with a 12" X 18" wire-glass window) provides

access to the stairway. The stairs are constructed and detailed indentically to those of the main stairwell.

The utility stairs between the third floor and the penthouse are also cement on steel frame. They rise thirteen steps to a platform, switch back, and with eight more steps ascend to the penthouse The steps are bare concrete and metal.

The utility stairs in the basement that provide access to the sunken boiler room are approached by a metal landing immediately inside the room. They consist of four steel steps with 2-inch steel pipe balusters and railings.

3. **Flooring:** The original basement floor is concrete incised in a 12-inch-square grid. Painted red, this original floor comprises the majority of the area. Carpet covers the floor of the periodical reading room. The floors of the boiler room, restroom and utility areas are plain concrete.

The original maple flooring of the first and second floors was removed when the building was converted to a library. The present flooring consists of carpet and rubber tile on the first floor and second floors. Asphalt tile and carpet are used on the third floor.

4. **Wall and ceiling finish:** In the basement the original plaster walls and ceilings (1/2-inch-thick plaster over concrete) were retained (several areas of are experiencing spalling plaster.) New dividing walls are plaster or painted concrete block.

The first and second floor walls, which include the original exterior walls and new sheet rock walls, are painted plaster. On the first floor, the original walls between the retail area and display windows were removed when the building was remodeled for library use. The ceilings on all floors except the basement are suspended with acoustical tile (2' X 4' panels) and 4-foot-square florescent light panels. The original egg crate light fixtures were removed during library conversion.

5. **Openings:** With the exception of the doors to the furnace room and other basement utility areas, the north stairways, and penthouse areas, the original doors have been removed. The doors that were installed during the building remodel in 1962 are typically 3 feet by 7 feet, solid core with a birch veneer finish. Hardware consists of standard chrome round knobs or push-bars.

The original doors are typically two-panel of either wood or metal. The widths vary, depending on function.

The doors to the basement restrooms are two-panel with horizontal louvers in the lower panel.

The doors on the first and second floor stairwells are aluminum-framed double doors with a single wire-glass panel. The first floor stairwell entry consists of two double doors and a wire-glass partition wall framed with aluminum. The second floor stairwell entry has a single set of doors and wire-glass partition wall.

6. **Decorative features and trim:** None of the original decorative features remain.

7. **Hardware:** The windows retain their original hardware (latches and pulls.) The remaining original doors (utility area in basement, restrooms in basement and third floor, and rear entry doors and vestibule) retain their original hardware. With the exception of the door pulls (ribbed chrome) on the easterly set of rear entry vestibule doors, the hardware is unadorned brass (in most cases painted.)

8. **Mechanical Equipment:**

a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: The boiler and heating system is fired by a peerless gas furnace located in a new room constructed in the original boiler room. This system was installed in 1986 after the Washington Water Power Company (WWP) closed its steam plant. Prior to this, the library heating system, as were many downtown buildings, was supplied by steam from the WWP plant. (Although the boiler room had a space for the boiler, it was never installed.)

In the original system, a combination of radiators and hot air vents provided heat to the building. Steam was piped to the north and south towers. Within the towers were heating coils and fans. The south tower, with four fans (powered by ten horsepower electric motors), heated air that was ducted to the basement, second, and third floors. The room above houses the pressure tank. The north tower (penthouse) with two fans supplied hot air for the first floor. Ceiling-mounted discharge ducts were located on the south walls of the basement, second and third floors (radiators were also installed in the offices of the third floor), and on the north side on the first floor.

When the building was remodeled, the basic heating system was retained, but upgraded. The basement uses the same air distribution system as originally designed. The air distribution system for the

first, second and third floors have been ducted to a network of vents above the suspended ceiling. In addition, 32-square-foot convectors are located in front of the first floor display windows. The existing radiators on the third floor were also retained.

An air conditioning system was added when the heating system was upgraded. Wooden evaporative cooler boxes are located on the north side of the south tower.

Each of the restrooms had an air extraction system which pulled air to a vertical duct that expelled waste air on the roof. An extraction fan was located in the penthouse.

b. Lighting: The original lighting system has been replaced by suspended florescent panel reflective lighting.

Original wrought iron lanterns are affixed to the exterior wall on either side of the front entry and the rear entry.

c. Plumbing: The water supply enters the southeast corner of the basement. The mechanical room houses the water meter, natural gas service and meter, supply line and valves for wet fire sprinkler system, and dry fire sprinkler system. The sprinkler systems provide protection to all floors. The basement also contains lavatory and water closet in northwest corner of boiler room. The building's hot water heater is in southeast corner of boiler room. A utility room (originally a men's toilet room with six lavatories, a utility sink, two urinals, and four toilets - five lavatories and two toilets have been removed) and a men's toilet room (originally women's with six lavatories and three toilets - two urinals added and one toilet removed.)

The second floor contains a women's restroom with six lavatories and four toilets (original, and remodeled.) Added during the library conversion is a boy's restroom with a toilet and lavatory and a girl's restroom with the same. A janitors' utility sink is in the northwest corner.

The third floor contains the original men's and women's restrooms. The women's restroom contains six lavatories and three toilets. The men's room contains three toilets, four lavatories and a utility sink.

d. Elevators: The original freight elevator (10' X 12') is in the northwest corner of the building south of the unloading room. The elevator provides access to the basement through third floors.

An Otis passenger elevator (5' X 4') was installed near the main stairwell when the building was converted to a library. This elevator provides access between the basement and third floors.

Three booklifts were also installed during the conversion. Two provide access between the basement and the third floors (3' X 2'10".) The other lift runs between the basement and first floor (1'6" X 1'9".)

D. Site:

1. **General setting and orientation:** The site is on the northwest corner of Main Avenue and Lincoln Street. The original site was rectangular approximately 160 feet wide and 400 feet deep (with a a 50' X 50' piece on the northeast corner.) It had a concrete driveway along the west side of the building and an asphalt parking lot north of the building. The building faces south (fronting on Main Avenue) with its east and south walls on the east and south property lines of the site.

The existing site (site map is attached) configuration differs from the original site. This is a result of the westward extension of Spokane Falls Boulevard to Monroe Street. The site now contains a parking lot west of the building as well as a portion of the original parking area north of the building. The southwest and northeast corners of the site contain landscaped islands with various evergreen shrubs (juniper and pine.) Landscaped islands are also near the southwest and northwest corners of the building

2. **Historic landscape design:** The original site plan indicates a 5-foot 6-inch wide and 110-foot long grass plot along the west side and a 39-foot wide by 50-foot long grass plot along the north side of the eastern half of the building. These areas are now paved.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings: The following drawings are extant: Original floor plans and elevations by Nimmons, Carr & Wright (9 drawings dated 21 September 1929 with subsequent revisions); General Plot Plan, Heating,

Ventilating, Plumbing and Sprinkler Plans by consulting engineer Martin C. Schwab (10 drawings dated 9 September 1929, revised 21 October 1929); Drawings for conversion to the library including Demolition, Architectural, and Electrical Plans by Carl W. Vantyne (23 drawings dated August 1962); Heating and Plumbing Drawings by H. Jack Reeves, mechanical engineer (7 drawings dated 8 August 1962.) The drawings are presently held by the Spokane Public Library.

B. Historic Views

1. Photograph No. 23 from original 8" x 10" negative, Charles A. Libby, photographer, February 1930. Original negative no. L871.41705-30 on file at Eastern Washington Historical Society Library, Spokane, Washington.
SOUTHEAST CORNER.

2. Photograph No. 24 from original 8 x 10 negative, Charles A. Libby, photographer, February 1930. Original negative No. L87-1.41711-30.
VIEW OF LIBRARY SITE FROM WEST SIDE OF MONROE STREET LOOKING NORTHEAST.

3. Photograph No. 25, photocopy of 8" x 10" photograph, photographer unknown, date circa 1950s, on file at Eastern Washington Historical Society Library, Spokane, Washington.
VIEW OF LIBRARY SITE FROM SOUTHWEST CORNER OF MONROE STREET AND MAIN AVENUE LOOKING NORTHEAST.

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2. **Secondary and published sources:**

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Carr, George Wallace. "Four stores for Sears Demonstrate Trend in Commercial Building Design." *Architectural Concrete* v.4 no.2 (1958), pp. 2-6.

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E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated

1. Archives of Sears, Roebuck and Company real estate and planning division.

2. Files, if available, of George C. Nimmons for inventory of projects completed for Sears.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This HABS report is a mitigative recordation at the recommendation of an environmental checklist prepared for the demolition of the building and construction of a new public library on the same site. The Spokane Public Library Board of Trustees is the lead agency for the project and on whose behalf the documentation was completed. Mr. Dan Walters, Director of the Spokane Public Library, is the responsible official and contact person.

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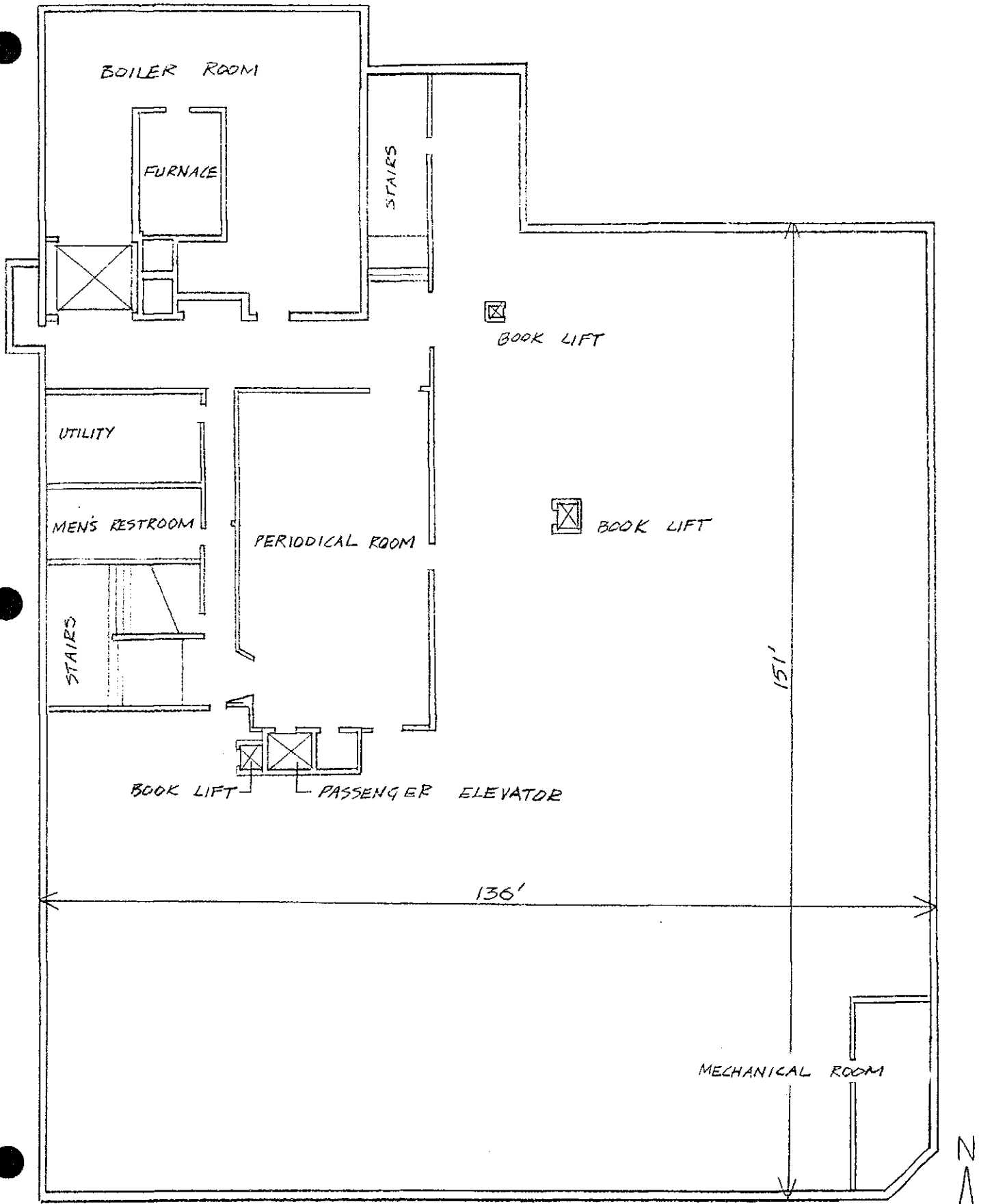
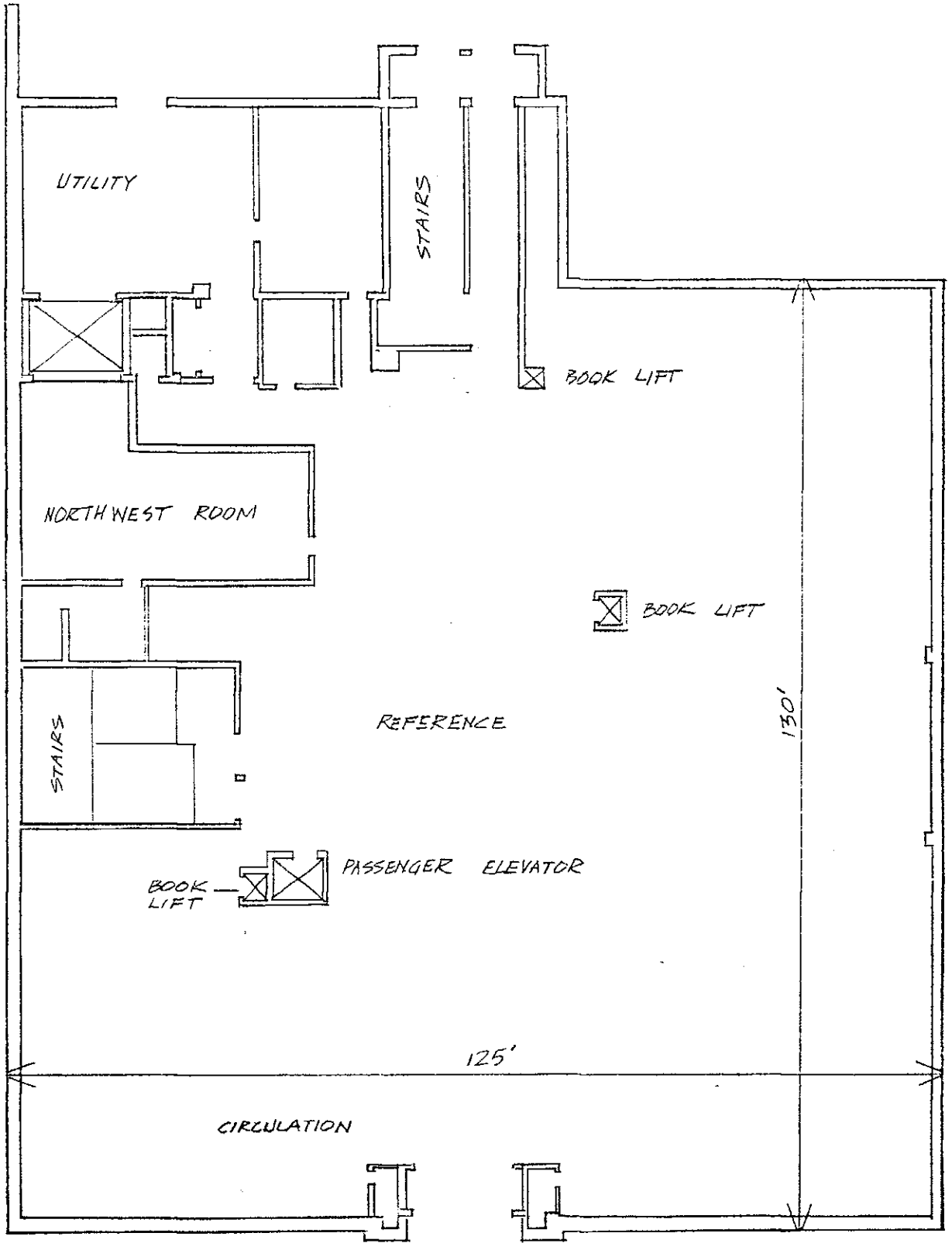


EXISTING BASEMENT FLOOR PLAN (January 1992)



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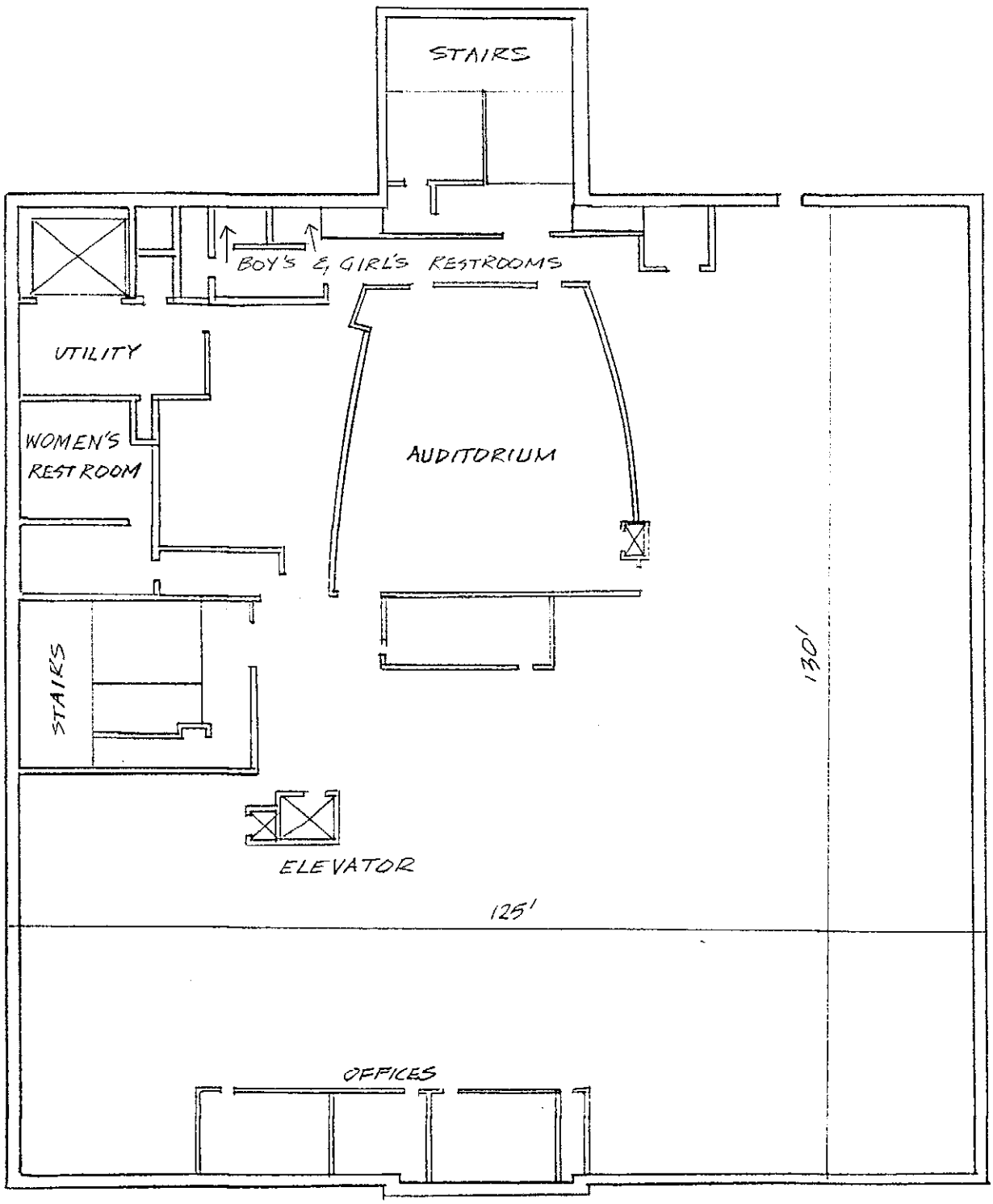

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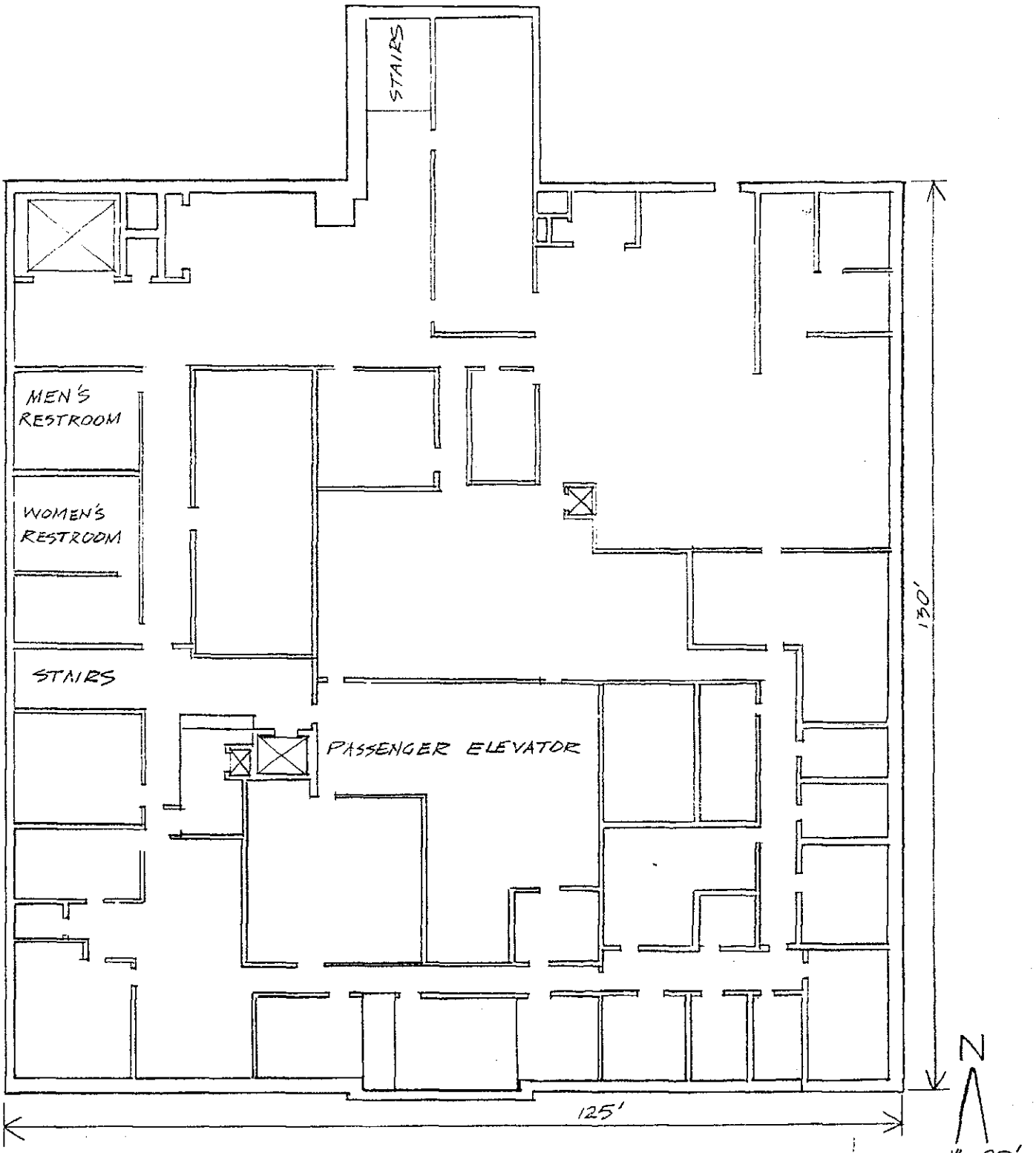

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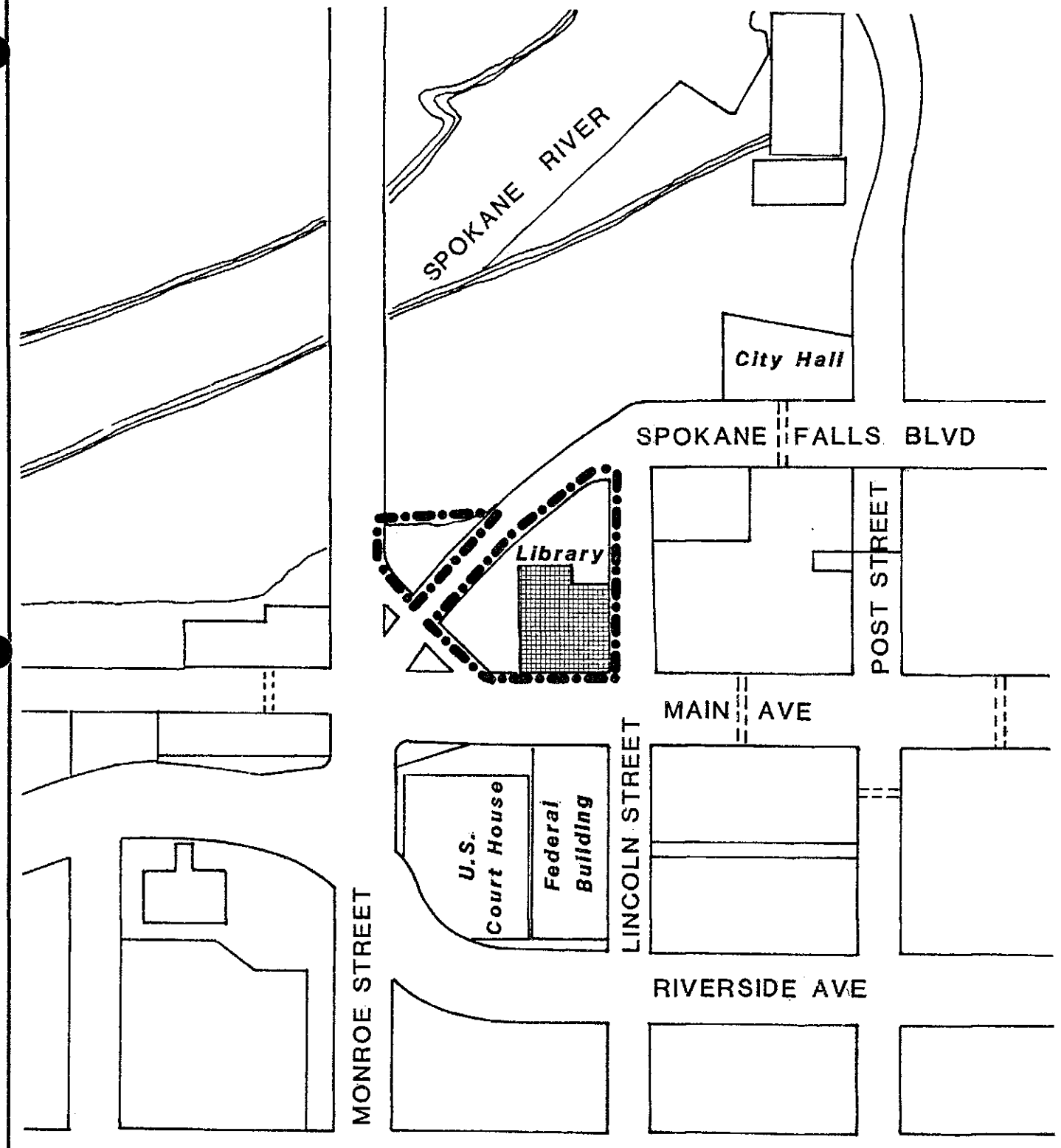
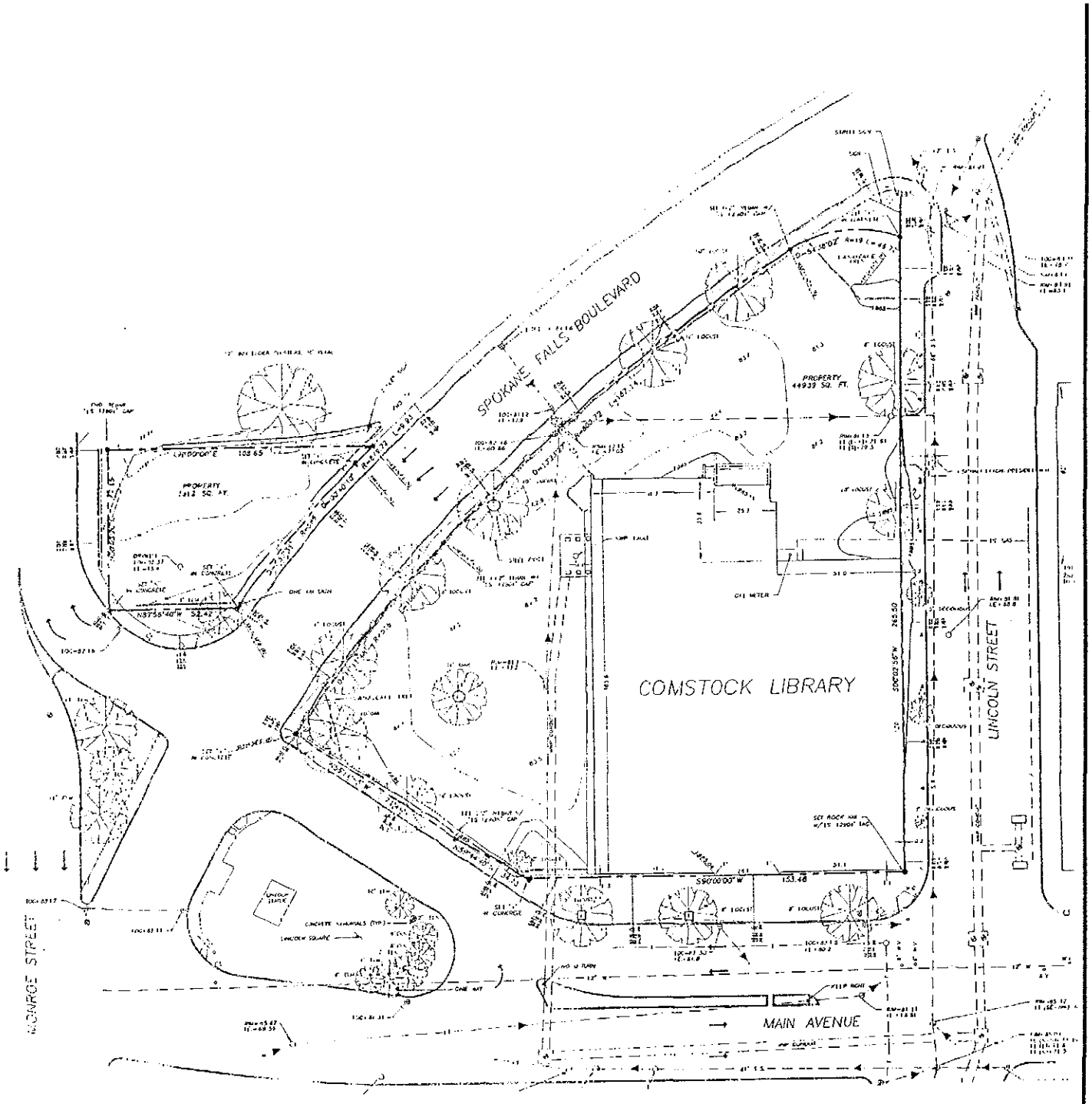


VICINITY MAP



EXISTING SITE MAP